

The ADAPT-r Creativity book

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Chapter I

Learning from a musician, a fashion designer, an architect and a dancer

*Jo Van Den Berghe, Valentina
Signore and Johan Verbeke*

In the beginning there was only Chaos. Then out of the void appeared Erebus the unknowable place where death and Night dwells. All else was empty, silent, endless, dark. Then, Eros was born bringing along the beginning of order...

No one can advise or help you – no one. There is only one thing you should do. Go into yourself. Find out the reason that commands you to write; see whether it has spread its roots into the very depths of your heart; confess to yourself whether you would have to die if you were forbidden to write. This most of all: ask yourself in the most silent hour of your night: must I write? Dig into yourself for a deep answer. And if this answer rings out in assent, if you meet this solemn question with a strong, simple “I must”, then build your life in accordance with this necessity; your whole life, even into its humblest and most indifferent hour, must become a sign and witness to this impulse.

R.M. Rilke

This chapter came into being as a collective project of the ADAPT-r research group of the KUL.

The research group soon decided to approach the matter of creativity by conducting interviews with awarded practitioners from different fields. Jo Van Den Berghe met two Flemish artists: the musician and composer *Jeroen D'hoë* and the fashion designer *Jan-Jan Vanessche*; while Valentina Signore interviewed the Norwegian architect *Siv Helene Stangeland*, (who is involved in the ADAPT-r program) and the Japanese dancer and choreographer *Akira Kasai*. We chose these four creative practitioners not only because they are worldwide awarded creative practitioners but also because they are important reference points for our own creative works. Interviewing our own exempla we also indirectly expose our understanding of creativity.

The device of the interview was decided to gently access their “secrets” in order to make them available to a bigger public while at the same time preserving their embedment into the artist’s specific world and personality. This choice was in fact aimed to prevent their generous revelations to be reduced into a set of rules, to rather privilege a form able to show them as integral part of inspiring and unique stories.

However, in this introduction, we will make an attempt to briefly summarize some of the many insights that we have learned

from the four interviews: certainly they made us reflect on the importance of the context within which creative production takes place, as well as more generally on the situatedness of its process (meaning not only the space, but also the people and the culture in which the creation is embedded). A recurrent reference to the necessity of slowness and to the need of taking the time, together with the importance of iterations in the process cleared out any preconception of the creative act as the sudden gesture of a genius (cfr. also Ranulph Glanville). This means also that learning from previous experiences plays a key role in the development of their mastery (cfr also Ranulph Glanville). Finally, the confrontation with not-knowing (cfr also Adam Jakimowicz), a sense of honesty, and some (philosophical) fundamental vision on life seem to be the very drive and source of their innovative way of thinking and making.

The two pairs of interviews present different focuses: Jo van den Berghe pays particular attention on *tools*, *people* and *spaces*, while Valentina Signore concentrates on the role of *Siv* and *Akira* as “authors” of their creations: to what extent their mastery means to control the process and to what extent do they keep real their encounter with the unknown?

The four interviews span from a generous attempt to contribute to the improvement of creative processes, to questioning the very purpose of reflecting and writing on creativity. Akira Kasai, in the last interview, turns in fact Valentina’s questions back toward her. Rather than revealing his secrets he drives his interviewer (and with her, the reader as well) into a journey in her innermost thoughts, feelings, desires and fears. We conclude our contribution with Kasai’s provocations. The emptiness he evokes brings us back to the Greek mythology of Creation: Chaos is at the first place, but before order can start to appear, another unknowable, dark and mysterious entity emerges from the void. Many other things we may learn from others’ creation but we cannot create or even speak about creation if we don’t have a personal encounter with such unknown places.

Similarly to this void, the silences were the most intense and beautiful moments of the conversations. Although it was not possible to transcribe them in the written text, the reader may probably hear their echoes in the intensity and truthfulness of the spoken words, born out of a deep inner search.

1.1 Jeroen D'hoë interviewed by Jo Van Den Berghe.

Jeroen D'hoë (Ph.D from the Juilliard School of Music, New York) is a music composer, and professor of music composition at the Lemmens Institute in Leuven, Belgium and the Music Conservatorium in Utrecht, the Netherlands. The interview has been done at Jo Van Den Berghe's home studio in September 2014.

Jo Van Den Berghe

Jeroen, let's start this interview as a contribution to an ADAPT-r book about how creative processes work in order to improve these processes finally. The book has 'Creativity' as a working title and in my interview with you, I would like to talk about the following themes: spaces, tools and people.

How do you experience the space you choose to work in as a music composer, or the space that is depending on or determined by the expectation of the final result ?

As a second theme, I propose to discuss the tools you use for your specific creative work as a music composer.

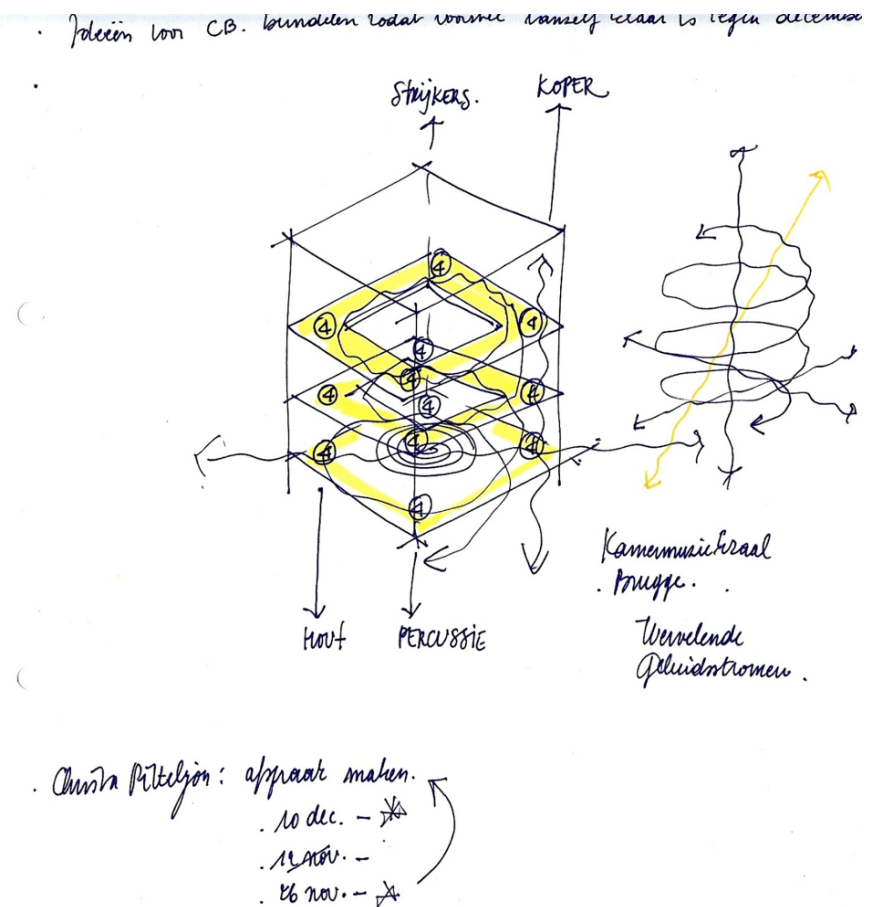
In the last theme, people, I like to explore how people are influencing your work as a composer in a positive or in a negative way. It may also be about the people you have in mind while your creative process is ongoing, or it can be a combination of both.

Let's first talk about what the specific spaces mean in your creative process.

Jeroen D'hoë

Space always is a natural dimension in composing and in realizing music. If we listen to music, the concert room

*Figure 1.1
Sketch made
by Jo Van Den
Berghe during
a work session
with Jeroen
D'hoë for the
creation of
Wekkering
(Jeroen
D'hoë, Music
Composer) at
the Chamber
Music Hall,
Concertgebouw
Brugge,
Belgium,
2010. In this
sketch, Jeroen
and Jo are
musing together
about how
the musicians
(people) would
perform better
due to their
positions in the
Chamber Music
Hall (spaces),
using the
reverberation
qualities of
this space as
an additional
instrument
(tools) in order
to augment
the impact of
the piece on
the audience
(people) so as
to turn this
creation into
a whirling
spatial-
temporal
experience
(space). This
sketch elaborates
on strings
(strijkers),
brass (koper),
percussion
(percussie)
and wooden
instruments
(hout).*



itself has a determining quality. An acoustic concert hall or a so called 'dry' concert hall makes a big difference in the projection and the reflection of sound. If I know in which space the concert takes place, my creative process of writing is always influenced. I do know that in what we composers call an over-acoustic space with a lot of resonance, the sounds of fast, vivid and tender music can be mixed up. Being influenced by the space itself composers write slow, sonorous sounds that are allowed to flow into one other. A very dry space however has the opposite effect permitting the composer towards a more intuitive, punctual attitude, an acoustic pointillism so to speak in which every detail can be discerned.

What I just mentioned is some sort of a common feeling between composers, but I would like to go one step further. While writing music as a composer I like to experience the intended internally. As composers are rather supposed to produce music in a static way, e.g. the pianist 'sits' at a piano, the concert room is not changing while playing music, nor is the position of the instrument or the position of the public, too.

The very interesting thing is trying to imagine that sound moves within a certain space like a dancer who makes a whirling movement on a stage. This creates a spatial rhythm which particularly interests me. Covering a certain distance in space within a certain time makes an interesting connection of spatial and temporal thinking.

Of course, we had a common project which was a fantastic experience that is called 'New feet for 5 years a minute'⁷ that made me involve space in composition processes in music, like a dancer does. I tried to imagine how sound covers a certain distance in space. I have been developing this into a deeper understanding which is very important for what I am doing currently. In

⁷ New Feet for 5 years a Minute has been an artistic research project by Jo Van Den Bergh and Jeroen D'hoë, in which composition techniques of architecture and music have been made interchangeable in order to make both disciplines (architecture and music) learn from each other.

architecture, to give one example, 10 meter can get a rhythm of 5 times 2 meter or of 2 times 5 meter what makes a very different experience. The whirling dancer causes an energy that can also be experienced by making sound, because sound is also the result of a very high energy. Striking one note on the keyboard of a piano produces a very strong concentrated energy that fades away afterwards during 10, 20 or 2 seconds. As a composer you can play with this space of time.

I only mentioned one instrument. The sound of five or ten instruments can be combined, collectively moving its sound in space in synchronic or asynchronic processes causing certain movements in sound and time. This is the deeper dimension of spatial thinking in sound and time. So space makes me rather think of this dimension than on the space of a concert hall.

Thank you, Jeroen. Does the place where you compose also have an impact on your work? For example, if you compose in your studio or sitting in a train, does this influence your work? Does it make a difference? Do you try to escape your environmental condition to work very empathetically on your subject, moving away from the surrounding space in a way, or are you involving the impulses of the surrounding space into your work as a composer, which might move your composition into another direction?

My workshop is of course a place where I feel good, it's a kind of laboratory where new ideas can be thought of and tried out. So it is a sort of a detached place where I cannot be disturbed. I have a good isolated big workshop where I can put my drawings that inspire me on the floor. On the other hand I always try to visit the place where the composition is planned to be performed. It can be a concert hall, a church, an exhibition place like recently a castle... I take photographs with my I-Phone. When I look back to these pictures, I kind of hear the acoustic possibilities of these spaces. Because walking through the places generates a natural acoustic intercourse with them,

for instance footsteps in the echo of a church. This hearing of space has become my second nature in the meantime. I also keep in mind the so-called sound of a space, so taking pictures is additive whereas I do need taking pictures to remember certain distances in rooms which is necessary for certain instruments.

But in my workshop I feel most comfortable as it is a detached place, where I am inspired by the pictures and the memories of sound of the location of execution of music, away from the place where the music will be brought. In this workshop I make drawings to visualize the music and I play the piano which is most important: to try out sounds. I also use the notation software system 'Sibelius', which writes notes from sounds, rhythms, arrangements. It is possible to create an elementary musical score which is to be refined several times afterwards. The final score will be read, executed and sung. So Sibelius is a medium for me.

This introduces our second theme: the *tools* of which there are plenty. I think your workshop is one of them...

Sure, it is my place to create. To create is to meditate. You have to lock up yourself, away from internet, emails or mobile. Every distraction must be excluded out of your biotope. David Van Reybrouck (writer) said that on his attic room, which is his workshop, he only put a kettle because quickly looking up something on internet, writing an email to a friend refrain him from working. Concentration for 1, 2, 3, 4 hours is necessary to get into the matter in order to generate creativity.

First condition is to isolate from daily reality. In that space I need a good instrument, my piano, to play on. It is the quality of that sound that brings me one step ahead. Next steps are developing the sound, varying, fine tuning into what I feel as a final product. Every detail has to match with the whole, note after note, it is a minute work like the work of a monk. So, as a conclusion, I say

that some tools have to be excluded, while other tools have to be present to feel as comfortable as possible.

Do you also have a favourite pencil, a favourite pen, your favourite annotation paper, like architects have?

Oh, yes, I have. Since my childhood I was keen to write with beautiful pencils, pen and ink. It is my sense of beauty that I am also looking for in the music I am composing. A beautiful pencil, a beautiful pen with my specific kind of ink. For every project I use to have a separate notebook in which I register every single idea, central or random. I compare it with an artistic blog. And of course my Mont-Blanc pen, I have it since one year now, and my special staff notation books, beautifully bound.

What you show me now (Jeroen shows sketches of a music composition) has been done with this pen?

Yes, this beautiful Mont-Blanc pen. And music annotation paper is also very important. I use paper from 'High-level Art', a famous editor of classical music, scores etc... They also produce empty music annotation paper, beautifully bound, onto which one can entrust one's first ideas about a composition. A natural way to write down not only verbally but also with real notes, rhythms, chords, ...

So on the one hand there is the process of realizing or materializing an idea, but there is also the process of the idea getting realized or materialized by working on it at the same time. So the sound of a piano could be the materialization in that case. Other examples of generating an idea can be paper, pen, the sound of a room...

Exactly, but I also get ideas that are less related to matter or space. Sometimes, the muse appears sitting in

a bus or washing the dishes. Or while taking a break just after searching one hour in the ideal place on the grand piano with the Mont Blanc pen. Or while making a walk as a break the idea can suddenly pop up too.

The free moment can be as important as the working moment ... ?

Yes, indeed, but in my experience, this rewards me after having worked intensively for at least one hour.

Free moments are not that free because there is the condition not to be distracted. For instance if I would send emails to friends and afterwards take a break for ten minutes, in fact this phenomenon of 'the fruitful break' never appears. I would say the state of mind, this concentration, is more important than the place because it can also happen on a bus.

It might be a kind of flow that is generating ideas. Happening in an 'unguarded moment'?

Indeed.

The 'unguarded moment' is as important as 'the guarded moment' while being amidst a creative process?

Yes, indeed. I receive these unguarded moments as a present that is so inspiring. These moments are indispensable for a continuous concentration. It is a kind of flow that generates these unguarded moments in which 'it' can happen.

Maybe one more question about the working space: if you wouldn't have had a workshop and you would ask someone to design it, what would be the parameters to make it, materially? Material, proportions, light, no light, kind of artificial light. As an architect, I imagine that a composer asks me to make a kind of space with certain conditions...

Figure 1.2
Jeroen D'hoë
(Music
Composer)
at work on a
music score on
Highlevel Art
with a Mont-
Blanc fountain
pen (tools), at
a consciously
chosen moment
in his preferred
summer garden
(spaces),
Hoegaarden,
Belgium, 2016.

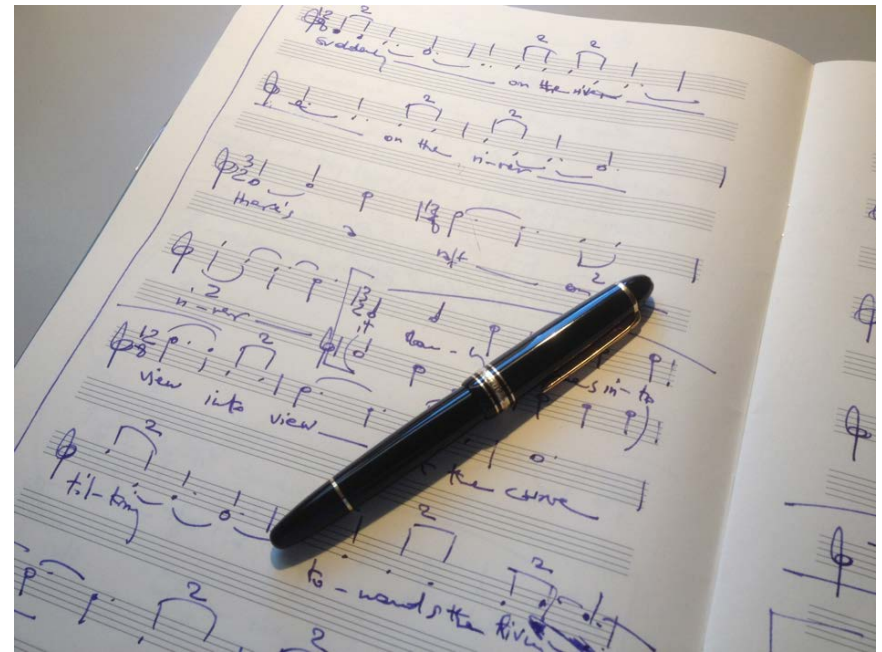


Figure 1.3
Jeroen D'hoë
(Music
Composer)
in an intense
conversation
with the
musicians
during a
try-out session
of *New Feet*,
testing different
versions of the
piece just before
a recording
session at the
Lemmens
School of
Music, Leuven,
Belgium, 2013.



Lots of space to be able to breath, enough light. It does not need to be direct light but smooth pleasant light that enables concentration for a long time. Wood makes a room agreeable and makes it sound softer. An environment in stone echoes louder and harder.

Is the space itself, the room in this case, also an instrument, a kind of resonance box?

Sure, unconsciously it certainly also creates resonance.

...like a guitar, a violin, a cello...

... yes, and like a concert hall.

Now we come to the third theme: *people*.

I never write without bearing in mind the people, the musicians who will create the piece of music. My musical score is ready for about 50 % or 70 % when I realize I still have a long way to go, even for developing new ideas, for fine tuning the technique of notifying. For the last 10 years, I systematically consult the people who invited me to compose a piece of music for a certain occasion, an orchestra, a concert creation, a concert or festival, and this about half a year before the final date. Then I have to meet the musicians. I already carry a kind of ideal sound by then, but in despite of my experience things are so amazing at that stage. Then I realize how much of fine tuning still has to be done in collaboration with these people. If someone plays lute, a world I could only partially imagine arises. When I hear a saxophone live in combination with a violin or a piano, it is very inspiring but also very confronting.

So I have to decide: this works and this does not work. A composer has to be very strict. I learned this by practice, to be honest, or by working with artists like Philip Cathérine who is ruthless. When it is beyond expectation, he throws it away, remakes it, changes structures, changes orchestration totally and keeps on searching for the ultimate solution. In my work this honesty, which I have

always had, has become a technique. So that is why I am repeating and fine tuning with my musicians four to six months before the first creation, on a secret place for some days. In real time I change different aspects in the score as well as the musicians do. We listen and consult each other about what is working, what not, if there is a problem: why? Too loud? Too soft...?

There are thousands of possibilities in the interaction with musicians and sometimes with the director of a music ensemble. So people are as important as the surrounding space and the tools. My first check-up is not the public but my partners in crime. They are the ones through whom I can check if it works or not. From that moment on, there is still 50 % or 70 % of work to do.

Yes, and besides these artistic-technical partners, are other people influencing your work ?

Well, yes, but allow me to add some more specifications. It is not so that musicians are influencing my work in terms of making creative choices. It is rather a feedback moment, like an actor who suggests something to the movie director: 'this works better than that, should we try it out?' So these feedback sessions are a kind of sound laboratory that I use to find out if my score works.

Sometimes, and additional to the musicians I work with, there are other creative partners involved in the process. Like my project in Gaasbeek 'Once upon a Castle' was realized by 15 creative people all together. These people were very influential and had an impact on me in the sense that there was reciprocity of giving and taking. There was sound reflection, visual reflection... In Gaasbeek, a British artistic collective has been invited to bring all the creative components together like an opera, for stage-management: suits, attributes, setting, video art, music. The partners kind of 'felt' each other and the director functioned like a coach in a football team. Of course there is a strong interaction between

all the participating disciplines. This was a marvellous experience, a nice change in the mostly solitary life of a composer which I cherish as well. Being asked to play in a team is most pleasant for me whereas writing a piece can take one year in your composing room. I also enjoyed the collaboration with you in 'New Feet for 5 Years a Minute', as it felt like a participation of joy, challenge, ambition, result, similar to this creative-artistic process. I like to work in both solitary projects and team projects. But I don't have to explain this to you.

(nodding in agreement) As my final question—we are busy yet for more than half an hour, amazing—people who surround you like your wife and your children, are they involved in your artistic process? Do you consult them sometimes in moments of doubt?

Yes sure, my wife has also studied Musicology. She is very intuitive and has a very good taste. She is for me—lucky me—the ultimate barometer. She is strict but in a positive way, very honest. If I feel something is not as it should be, she confirms or she does not tell that it does work. I am very fortunate that she helps me in this way with my creative processes. My children have been educated in this atmosphere of creating, and often they accompanied us on concerts, expositions or other cultural events. They are not that involved, but I can take them with me to a repetition. When I ask what they think about it, these are important moments of echo or feedback for me. The funny thing is, as I mainly work on classical music, at the cross-over to jazz and pop prevented me to be locked up. I know some colleagues are not aware of the privilege to work with music at this high level, but at the same time they are not aware how isolated one can become from the average concert lover. As if this art is no more connected to the people interested in added value.

Or in life itself ...

Yes. The freak of modern music and the freak of modern experimental music does exist but I don't think

it exceeds one percent of the people. So the gratitude of the people, the street value, I learned in New York where music does not know the safety of subsidization but where it has to work in the music hall or you do not sell tickets. In New York I learned the street value of composing and I apply this now in classical music without compromising myself but by creating in an authentic way. This is very interesting to me.

Just one more question: as an architect and as a composer, we have 'heroes', also beyond our discipline. Are there heroes whose creation processes you have investigated?

Yes, there is a long list...

Just two of them...

Mozart is very inspiring, besides the music itself, as a composer he was a genius for his attitude. He knew which simplicity he might admit. If he had only created music according to the unlimited intellectual capacities he reached easily, the average music lover would not have had connection with his art. He was smart enough to situate the level of complexity at a point where people could enjoy and enter his work yet at the same time he kept his level extremely high. This is really adorable and exceptional. Keeping a high level, but lowering the threshold.

The same goes for Leonard Bernstein who has written an iconic musical with West Side Story like nobody could have written it. It contains elements of Stravinsky, Bartok and Rachmaninov that Bernstein has integrated in a genius way in popular art. Mozart did the same, his music was of a very high level, but was integrated in theatre pieces with people laughing or being scared, triggering them, originating from fairy tales sometimes.

In the larger domain of art there is the painter Michael Borremans because he is very accessible with his figurative art, but at the same time his work always

contains deeper layers of mystery. You see a woman but she does not look at you, her hair is hanging up, you don't know what it is. You don't get answers and that mystery, this alienation is poetics and this is inspiring me.

I also like to write dancing themes or themes that permit to sing, very simple melodies in a sometimes medieval mood, because this contains common roots that we recognize. And then I will put a twist in it, some components that cause alienation. So it is not just medieval. Borremans explained that he is inspired by Velasquez, but he makes a Borremans-Velasquez if you permit me to say it in his words.

Ok Jeroen, thank you for this interview.

It was my pleasure!

1.2 Jan-Jan Vanessche interview

Jo Van Den Berghe

Jan-Jan Vanessche is a fashion designer who graduated from the Antwerp Fashion Academy and who operates from Antwerp in Belgium. He teaches fashion design at the Fashion Academy in Antwerp and in Den Haag in The Netherlands. Jan-Jan Vanessche runs the Solar Shop, an international design collective based in Antwerp, Belgium

The interview has been done during the preparation and the celebration of a gorgeous meal in the fashion design studio of the fashion designer in Antwerp in 2014, together with his collaborators, who have willingly participated in the interview conversation.

JJVE: Jan-Jan Vanessche (fashion designer)

PC: Pietro Celestina (assistant fashion designer)

Charlotte (assistant fashion designer)

IVK: Ingrid Van Kerkhove (external manufacture workshop owner)

Jo Van Den Berghe

This interview is about questioning creative people about how to become more aware of their creative processes in order to see if we can gain more insights into these processes. The interview is also meant to find out if e.g. fashion designers can learn something from other creative disciplines. People, tools and conversations are the main themes.

PC: ... there are still potatoes in the oven...

As we can enjoy the meal with you all (Pietro and Charlotte work together with Jan-Jan), I suggest that everybody around this table participates if he or she wants to. It's all right with me.

JJVE: I like the themes.

PC: Indeed, Jan-Jan.

JJVE: Concerning People, Anne Flaten Pixley, the lady from the Camargue I was talking about the other day, is super inspiring because whether she talks about food or textile (she was teaching housewives at that time) or about top art... Within these different fields of interest she has a 'master' once in her life, and you can feel that she has been doing these things for years this 'from the belly', with her whole body and soul, and she is still doing so. She is still that eager and that is why she is still a big example for me.

PC: Also for me, she is aware of an emergency of time at her age...

JJVE: At her age she says: "I will do that" whereas at my age I say "I still have to do this one day". She says "I will make this plate, I will visit this place". She is also profound in her research, I mean if she is reading something, she will order five books at once about it at Ammazon.com. She really knows something about a subject whereas I look up something in one book looking at a picture and making conclusions, rather than reading. Of course, everyone has his way to look up something, but she is an example. Also, she gives a kind of recognition of what you are doing, a kind of 'you are on your way', even if you are just beginning. Recognition of collaborators in your workshop is very valuable but can feel a bit 'worn' because you are always working with them, it is not that...

PC: ... motivating?

JJVE: Motivating indeed.

Confirmation upon confirmations ...

JJVE: It is a recognition indeed to get comments from this kind of person. Another example of such a person is the Italian designer I met two years ago: Maurizio Altieri, a real diehard who never has had a cult label between about 1995 and 2000. A lot of designers still

produce bad copies

PC: Just copies, not always bad.

JJVE: Maybe, but sometimes not inspired. We were in his apartment where he designed really every detail. As he cannot stand round wholes, all the light switches and basins are square.

PC: He created his own universe.

JJVE: We did that too in our apartment but we did not adapt everything as we intended to do, even if it keeps bothering me every day. Maurizio rented his apartment. Triple sockets protrude from the surface of the wall. There is an electrical connection in the wall that has been plastered away subsequently. The warrant money cannot be paid back that way. A former apartment he was expected to restyle as a fashion designer. In Italy they might expect 'gold' or so, but he completely stripped it down up to wooden beams and concrete walls. Of course he was kicked out with legal charges, but he doesn't mind.

I find this inspiring. He enters my showroom and takes the coat's seam that is not stitched that right... He pushes on pain points but I appreciate this. It makes me aware.

Somehow I already knew, but, this is fantastic in fact, these comments are helpful for you to never forget to make mistakes like that in the future.

Has this person changed you? Did this appointment change you?

PC: It is motivating because comments of these people, far away from commercial stuff, are based upon their own experience. He already has been working this way.

JJVE: Moreover, he is one of the biggest players in his field, in fact he is working without compromises and in fact he is too rigid, he was earning nearly no money at all, I'm sure he must have had financial support from a 'maecenas'.

He had a rich father perhaps?

JJVE: I don't know: he does not need much money. But of course, having hundreds of fans may help. If you are in Paris during the fashion week, you see people adoring him, rather ridiculous, but I was familiar with his work before I have known him or his reputation. I think this is the key why he likes us, because we do not crave for him. I would not say he has changed me, it is rather a confirmation of the things I did, of keeping on doing things the way I did, of persisting.

Anne is working the same way as Maurizio but in a much milder way, less macho, less Italian, less punk. She is rather a kind Nordic hippy. It was nice meeting these similar people with different characters within a rather short time span. Anne is more gentle, also very critical, but she likes the funny thing about it rather than showing disgust.

Hm. Punk ?

PC: It seems like, as time goes by, the periods in which we meet these people, appear more often and that is fine.

JJVE: The thing I like about it is that the more I am working at it, I mean the last two collections in Paris felt satisfying at the end, just good. About my former collections I thought more like: "What the hell have I done with this or that piece from the collection?"

(laughing with recognition)

JJVE: While making a collection as a designer, you have the feeling you never reached the point you wanted to reach, whereas this time I thought, this piece can be launched into the world and I felt more satisfied.

Through working long hours on a collection things becomes more clear, like for the last two collections in Paris, I thought: this one is good. I really appreciate

this collection. Before, I had the feeling not to have been ready. This time I was thinking: this should be shown to the world. The whole team, not only me, felt calmer. Since we also meet more people who, just by being there, show how they feel what you feel.

Yes!

PC: It happens that you meet them by accident ...

JJVE: ... and that is fantastic. Before I was afraid of going to Paris, I did not want to go to Paris, I wanted to show my collection in Antwerp. I did not like the pumped-up fashion design week in Paris. But it is possible to live a kind of parallel alternative week in Paris. There are indeed very interesting people. Concerning the material, the fabric, I like to use the fabrics that are available. The limitation of materials can be an inspiring factor, to re-use fabrics for patchworks and for hand woven fabrics.

These days I am looking forward to Paris, if I do not take into account the stress of deadlines, also for meeting the owners of the shops and boutiques. And the people who are shopping. They can be fantastic too, their feedback is always very valuable. Because, as a designer, you come out only once every season let's say, in January and June.

So next time is January ...

JJVE: Yes, but this is very hard work, also for the apprentices in my studio, my mother...

PC: And the manufacture workshops, where the production takes place ...

JJVE: Yes but without them there would be no collection at all ...

The manufacture workshops make things more

obvious, things are changing and getting forward. Their input is indispensable.

You were talking about things becoming more clear and obvious. What is the reason, is there a 'pattern'?

JJVE: I think it is experience, getting used to it, having less stress. Also in the process of designing you become more self-confident. I still have doubts, but not any longer on the fact whether I am a designer or not. Before I did not know myself and I was uncertain about what I was doing. I do not have that feeling any more.

It is a sort of a calibration process?

JJVE: Yes, and the better the design, the better you learn to launch it business wise..

Because it feels more 'right', it fits better into your primary intention. For this reason your production process becomes more easy, it all comes together.

PC: You also become more familiar with the manufacture workshops, fabric makers, shops. This contributes to the necessary knowledge.

JJVE: Buying fabrics nowadays has become easier, there is that confidence, they know what you want just by doing it and meeting more often. But there still is the stress of the next collection. We helped ourselves by making only one collection a year the first three years, which enabled us to provide time to make mistakes. These mistakes could be corrected, while nowadays, there is less time and space for mistakes ...

PC: The reasons for mistakes can be lack of anticipation, canceling of fabrics deliveries, mistakes in the design, in the production, new input coming from the production process that imposes changes in the design itself

...

JJVE: ... a showroom that was cancelled. Even when you are becoming very experienced things like that keep popping up ...

JVDB: ... there is nothing to do about that, that is the external machinery...

JJVE: ... as a fashion designer, maybe comparable to an architect, you have to wait for fabrics that have to arrive on time because the 'making time' is scheduled in the manufacture workshop; the manufacture workshop has to make it in time because the photo-session has to start because the pictures have to be ready for the catalog. As a designer, you have to deliver and produce all the time for the next step to happen, and then when receive the result you have to control it... You depend on so many external factors that you really need the feeling of being in control, of anticipating, or you just become crazy.

JVDB: And suddenly, somewhere things go wrong. This is the logistic part of the job, but there is also the more fundamental part of it, where creation emerges ... These anxious doubts can be more compelling

JJVE: Yes, and in the current fashion season I permanently have this feeling. I am developing this collection, 'stealing' design hours here and there, for an hour, for half an hour, a little bit of this, a little bit of that... this is an awful feeling. For more than one month, I cannot immerse myself in the matter by means of creativity. I am making separate things, good on their own, but the pieces will again have to 'fall' together into a consistent collection. These kind of deadlines are somehow less stressful because I do not depend on other stakeholders. External deadlines are more threatening for the ideas of the designer. So I first have to deal with them, and then the good idea will have to wait until night hours where sometimes it unfortunately disappears.

Charlotte: But you know, if the main stream of ideas is ok,...

So a purely practical problem becomes a fundamental problem because something of the practical layer intrudes the fundamental layer...

JJVE: And so the most important aspects are getting the least priority ...

I recognize this all too well as an architect.

JJVE: Because we are basically two persons who do the follow-up. Instead of designing, I have to do the follow-up of the production more and more. I have to be very vigilant about that!

Charlotte: If we could pay someone for doing this job, it would change the thing.

JJVE: This is the first thing that has to be done: to engage someone for the supervision of the production. This will enable me to activate my creative process. I am used to work in a very intuitive way. Although I design in a considerate way, my first drawings are literally 'écriture automatique', just having fun with silhouettes, stains ... Afterwards I start to analyze it because I think my design should be a part of myself.

This is a very important quote.

JJVE: This is the only thing I even do not consider, I believe it. I make sketches of silhouettes for three days, hundreds of them, very quickly, without thinking about material, length, only positions and postures, atmospheres, good images. Afterwards I try to find the connection that runs through it all, the core of consistency. That is the most pleasant part of the process. If I could do this all day long ...

This is the first part of the process?

JJVE: Yes, afterwards the designs become more practical, 'boring'. First there is the sketch, then a technical drawing, then a pattern, then a prototype in fabric I

make here together with the apprentices. Afterwards it becomes a collection prototype made by the manufacture workshop. That piece goes to the showroom and from that moment, it becomes a dangerous devil and all the fun has gone.

The prototype from the showroom comes back in, and then comes the question: how many pieces are ordered, how many meters of fabric do I have to order? Do I have all the buttons? Do I have enough labels? This process occupies my time between June and October. So I still do many other things than designing alone. My designing process is situated within my production process. Both processes are interwoven.

What would be the alternative?

Someone taking over the production process from the showroom, someone who knows the prototypes because he has to understand the pieces in the collection. I do this by myself, Pietro is starting to help me but I do the major part. Pietro deals with the part of the fabrics, and I do the supervision of the technical aspects: the patterns, the technical drawings, the division of the fabrics towards the different manufacturers, ... which takes a full week of puzzling. We can only do half of this work package because the other half of the fabric first has to be sent to the dying manufactory. I don't sleep then because of those half packages. "Did I order fabric for these two black shirts?"

Big companies order six or seven rolls of one fabric to be sure, but for financial reasons I usually order one roll and cut e.g. twenty meters for this manufacturer, etc. ... Working this way can cause mistakes.

Charlotte: But maybe if you order big amounts of fabric, there is the risk of losing more money when it goes wrong.

JJVE: Yes, but computer software can make exact

calculations.

That exactly can go wrong t ... ?

JJVE: Right ...

You described the practical contamination of a creative process that started as very pure. Can the practical aspects of the process also inspire the creative process in a positive way?

JJVE: Yes, up to the showroom prototypes it is inspiring. I find making patterns as inspiring as the pure designing process. The pockets I make here ...

PC: ... very exceptionally!

JJVE: ... yes, but this constitutes the identification of my clothing as it is now. The inside is more beautiful than the outside. The construction is unique, I am proud of it. That pocket must not be complicated. But the fact not to work with standard pockets of manufacturers ... I get a kick on developing a new sort of cuff, sleeve slit. If I would put the button of these trousers in a shirt, what is the consequence and how will be the finishing ? This is the job of the apprentices. They do the try-outs and they come back to me with the eventual technical problems. For instance: how the hell can we stitch this in a way it is still open? Sometimes I put that piece aside for three days thinking about it. But this is my research and developing process.

PC: A lot of designers cannot stitch well. They produce an idea and give it to someone else to develop and make it . Jan-Jan does this himself and he becomes better by doing it, informed by the knowledge of making. This process is valuable but it takes away time from something else in the process.

JJVE: I could say: "I do not make patterns any more, I give the technical drawing to the manufacturer who

will make the pattern. But you cannot control this. I restyled T-shirts because my raglan sleeve absolutely had to be in a 45 degree position. This is the most important thing in my clothing: one must be able to move within it! Wearing it in a comfortable way. People wearing it have to feel free. It is fantastic that in my last two collections shop owners say to me: I feel greatly relieved. Then I say: that is exactly what I want!

The ultimate mastery of the technics lead to this of course!

JJVE: But I still didn't arrive to the point I want to, and often I have been doing interesting things and then I do them again and again ...

IVK: From the point of view of the manufacturer, I thought that your design starts from the pattern itself that you are developing all the time. I was not aware of those steps before, the drawings.

JJVE: The drawings give an image of the attitude of the collection, what is the length, the space volume of the clothing, in fact I had to skip this in the conversations that we have and that proceed the production itself because of the time pressure.

Charlotte: You already chose a final model out of the preliminary sketches before you start the communication with the manufacturer.

JJVE: 70 % of the sketch ideas is not used at all.

I show you some drawings: they are made very quickly, from the belly, almost without 'thinking'..

What is the material you make these drawings with? What are your tools?

JJVE: Pencil, pen, ink, a glass pen, a fatty, greasy

charcoal-like pencil. My material depends on the collection, the things I would like to work with at that moment. Drawings mostly start vague, like this (shows a drawing). That process takes about one week, this set of drawings took three days.

Intense work!

JJVE: This is fun for me. I mostly first draw the models that I dress afterwards. But this jacket has been drawn at the same time with the model.

Do you make drawings here in your studio, or everywhere?

JJVE: These small models I draw in the airplane, with a ballpoint. I have been drawing my most recent collection on the flight from Rome to Antwerp. I do not care if anyone is watching, people do not understand what I am doing. I am not afraid of people stealing my ideas. If you glance at this, you get another idea out of it than I do anyway.

And these drawings are all archived ?

JJVE: Yes, (laughing) I hope to find them back ... I also draw in the train if it is not for work, a sort of relaxation. I use tools, I have some pens, it can take one or two collections to 'loosen'. A ballpoint is fantastic, always greasy enough.

Is a fountain pen that is often used better than a ball-point?

JJVE: Yes, but I like the combination. I make always copies of the drawings and work on them. With these copies I pin derived silhouettes or pieces of silhouettes of these originals on a blackboard. Then I start with the technical drawings, 'drawings' at first. In these drawings a shirt might not be distinguished from a jacket, one layer not from two layers, and all these small attempts and

steps gradually form a consistent collection. Small pieces of fabrics are crossing over these drawings all the time.

Are you also teaching these procedures? What is your teaching about?

JJVE: It is about things like: find out whether you like to draw with a ballpoint or with water-color. I like to make the students express what exactly they want to talk about, why they choose fashion education in the first place. . I am teaching in the first year and this question is more relevant in the fourth year, but first year students do have to know that they have to think about this.. Some students are not aware of it at all. This school system is new this year in Den Haag, and it has been introduced by the Antwerp Academy earlier. Some teachers from Antwerp started twelve years ago in Den Haag. Teachers from Belgium often work there.

Why would that be? This is not only the case in fashion. Belgian architects are also very in the mood in the Netherlands nowadays ...

JJVE: This might be a consequence of the student revolution in the sixties. Students demanded participation and so they almost became colleagues of their teachers. In the Netherlands, the mentality that 'if only the idea about how to work is ok, if the goal of education is ok, if only teachers are nice people', that everything is ok. In Belgium your work is estimated on its own, 'is the work itself valuable or not?' I am making a pastiche of both cases here, but this might explain the roots of the working ethos now. Students in Belgium did benefit from less participation than in Holland. We address our teacher more often as 'sir' or 'professor' whereas in the Netherlands students call professors by their names. On the one hand it is a more familiar, more human, sociable way to work—what I missed in the Antwerp Academy—but on the other hand—and I was not aware at the beginning—there is not enough 'professional' engagement by the students if their behaviour becomes too loose.

Charlotte: It is interesting but difficult to get discipline and rigour without terror ...

JJVE: But terror never works in the long run ...

Charlotte: But is an interesting question how to get into this rigorous mode with students anyway; how the teaching system can make you work hard without creating fear.

PC: Separating the corn from the chaff ...

JJVE: This is only working for American universities, where you compose your own program, where there is more interference with teachers, but where the level of output is very high. You are responsible yourself for the package you compose yourself. In that case it is possible. But young students who still don't have that level first have to learn about the requested minimum level of the education. I won't mention their reactions, from anger to adoration. The requested level is obvious in fashion shows, magazines, in the demonstrated fashion and education practices of the professors themselves ... In this case students choose a school according to their self-created expectations. In Antwerp, this kind of expectation is known as 'terror'. People think it is impossible to finish this program whereas each year ten people graduate. I would really like to implement this level without 'terrorizing'. It is a difficult job within the Dutch school culture.

For instance, I asked the students to finish eight silhouettes from ten (it was a collection of ten pieces) of which two pieces in fabric. The reaction of one student was: "... but if I finish four pieces and a very good explanation ..."

Charlotte: But it is possible to be clear without using a kind of terror, you can say Jan-Jan ...

JJVE: I know, and this is what I keep doing, but I do not get anywhere with a too loose way of working. I

have to lose control in front of the class sometimes and I have to say: "I'm sorry, but this is crap". Sometimes you have to be strict and generate some fear in order to make the students move and make progress!.... I first try to say it seventeen times in a friendly way, and if this does not generate any change then I say it one time in an angry way. It takes rigor and discipline to do the right job. Last year they said "we didn't know Jan-Jan could act this way" but I then say "you urge me to do so!". And this was not earlier than in April. There is a sort of lax discipline in that school that has to be changed.

Does it exist: top quality without 'barking' ?

JJVE: I don't think so, I doubt it ...

Functional barking, not on the person, or stroking and beating simultaneously...

JJVE: No, not striking physically of course. But I have to say: "this is not good, what did you do all that time? You come in with five drawings, you made this in a couple of hours yesterday evening ... I come all the way from Antwerp to help you and you quickly made some drawings yesterday. If you leave, I can spend more time to the students who want to be here. Sometimes you have to 'shake and awake' them!"

Charlotte: But you can focus on the deplorable level of the work without intimidating and depreciating the person ...

JJVE: Indeed, I can focus on someone's (bad) work, but when I see that this student starts to cry I stay with him or her until he or she is calm again, don't take this personally. You start anointing again, I do not want to intimidate at all!

JJVE: But I can get angry, I didn't get up at five o'clock in the morning to travel from Antwerp to Den Haag just to see drawings in other sequences with

another big explanation... than I get prickly. My language turns into Antwerp slang because I am speaking from my body and soul at that moment. There is also time pressure: ten minutes per student, it is a big responsibility. I use this time as good as possible for every person to become a good designer.

PC: They see the fashion academy a very romantic place ... working hard is rather confronting ...

JJVE: But the best thing I can do is repeating this question: 'why?' Why? Why does one do what he or she does? Repeating this question also to myself, without forgetting to smile?

PC: This is not easy ...

JJVE: No, but do not say to me that clothing is a way to express ... because this is too obvious as a motivation! Rather I would like the student to say what (!) he or she wants to express? Not the usual "I want to express myself", but the deeper dimensions of what that students wants to say to the world. And my students have to inquire this maturity during the first year. No one can pass the first year if he or she does not even know the beginning of what he or she wants to be.

Charlotte and PC: This is not easy because ...

JJVE: ... but there can be an evolution. This is High School!

And you have to say things in a direct way when you only have ten minutes.

JJVE: Last week I made someone cry because I asked her if he knew Rudolf Steiner? She said, crying: "I was in a Steiner School for 15 years." I replied: "Yes, I can see it, so did I." The last thing I said was important for her to hear, in order not to cry anymore. But her drawings looked like those of a little child of the Steiner School, I

even recognize the label of color pencils. I suggested her to draw some weeks with black and grey pencils, just 'dry' drawings, and it helped! She made collages with it... but I hated the flue blue back-ground of her drawings. I do recognize it miles away. I said "ok if you want to, but it is not up to date." Doing so I could explain that it is not evident to show such a collection in Paris, to show something new to the world, and maybe it's exactly this what the world is expecting from us ...

Charlotte: (laughing) Have a try, it is a challenge ...

JJVE: I said that this seems very difficult to me. And then I made a joke and offered her a cup of coffee, and the crying was over. Then my student starts to understand that this is very interesting.

I do recognize everything, really, like if it is teaching at school of architecture.

PC: How many years do you teach architectural design?

More than 10 years.

JJVE: It is very beautiful, the students among themselves and that atmosphere in the corridors. For example there was a student who did the fourth year two times and I can say that I have helped him because his power was not obvious but I found the key, maybe because I am a younger teacher so that he felt more familiar and maybe, as he was very detached, I am very open and communicative. He even won an award in the Netherlands as the best graduated student after that fourth year. Now he has completely changed and became very professional while we had thought it would never work at a certain moment ...

To witness this intellectual change is glorious.

*I am very happy I can do this job and it has always
been my dream.*

1.3 Who creates and what is created? Dialogues with Akira Kasai and Siv Helene Stangeland

Valentina Signore

Who creates and what is created? The one who does create cannot solve this dilemma.

In the beginning there was only Chaos. Then out of the void appeared Erebus the unknowable place where death and Night dwells. All else was empty, silent, endless, dark. Then, Eros was born bringing along the beginning of order...

(Greek Creation Myth)

In the Greek mythology of Creation Chaos is at the first place, but before order can start to appear, another unknowable, dark and mysterious entity emerges from the void. It seems that we cannot create or even speak about creation if we don't have a kind of encounter with such unknown places.

In my experience what I recall as a veritable moment of creation is a butoh dance performance I did in Sardinia in 2010. At a certain moment I laid down on a street of the village of San Sperate, six other dancers lifted my body and moved it to another spot I didn't know of. Then my 15' improvisation had to start. I had promised myself not to do one single movement that was unnecessary and just to openly wait for something real to happen that would have started my dance. If not, I was ready to lay down still for 15' in front of a public who expected a dance, or at least some kind of movement. While I was displaced through the air, I opened all my body, senses and heart to the unknown, sure to encounter something on the ground that would have started my dance. But when I touched the ground in my field of view only white walls and the blue sky appeared. Nothing happened: my body was lost in that white void, exposed to the eyes of the public. My heart became a battlefield of fears and desires. Then a leaf moved by the wind came toward me and moved me inside: a dance able to listen, to welcome and to flow

with the emerging presences of each instant had started.

In the last eight years, while working mainly as researcher in academia, I have been studying and practicing intensively architecture as well as butoh dance. No matter the medium - if I am drawing, improvising a dance or writing an essay- I am in search for that special moment of “things” happening by themselves. It can be a sketch on paper, a movement, a concept, that starts to emerge, then I try just to listen and follow it, until it manifests itself as necessary while I find myself becoming anew. The decision to write about creativity went along with the choice to interview two people that I met along my paths in these different fields and whose work resonates with my own search for creation: Akira Kasai, a butoh dancer and choreographer- and an architect - Siv Helene Stangeland. While the two conversations took different paths, my curiosity came back to their role as “authors” of their creations, to the place that they occupy in the process: how do they keep real their encounter with the unknown, while they have developed a mastery in their field? Looking back and across the two interviews, it is apparent how an existential search underlies their creative paths. At the same time, they approached my questions in a completely different way: Siv seems to reveal her “secrets” while Akira, turns my questions back toward me. Such a difference is maybe the most interesting outcome of this operation. It opens the question about the very purpose about writing and reflecting about creativity. Certainly it does bring some important insights, however, Akira, almost refusing to directly reply, seems to point directly to the main risk to translate what we learn into formulas, as in a veritable creative act the whole life of a person is at stake.

The silences were with no doubts the most beautiful and intense moments of both the conversations. It is difficult to translate them in the written text, I hope the reader will hear their echoes in the intensity and truthfulness of their spoken words.

1.4 Interview with Siv Helene Stangeland

Siv Helene Stangeland was born in Stavanger, Norway 1966. She studied French and art in Bordeaux one year before starting her studies in AHO Oslo (The Oslo School of Architecture and Design) under Sverre Fehn and Christian Norberg Schultz, where she graduated in 1996. She decided to become architect in Barcelona, where she followed classes at the Technical University ETSAB and at the art school of Massana. Back at AHO in 1992 she met Reinhard Kropf, who became since then her partner in life and work. They formally established the firm Helen&Hard in 1996, following their Diplomas. She has completed supervision education based on psychosynthesis and Gestalt theory, she is currently involved in the ADAPT-r program. The Interview was made via Skype in July 2014. I was in Brussels and Siv in Stavanger.

Valentina Signore

I would like to know what you understand as ‘creating’ and what is your own way of creating. Maybe there is a project where you find most apparent your own way of creating.

Siv Helene Stangeland

I think that my awareness of creativity, of its cultivation, and my relation to it, have changed very much through the years. There is an evolution in that sense.

Thus it is not easy to choose one project, but I can recall the very first project Reinhard and I did (Herring Sea House restaurant, Stavanger, 1995). We just came from school and we were a kind of students thrown into a more complex reality. And there it happened a kind of discovery: that this more complex reality is more similar to what I recall as a playful creativity being a child, when I was creative with whatever happened around me and with whatever I could play with around me.

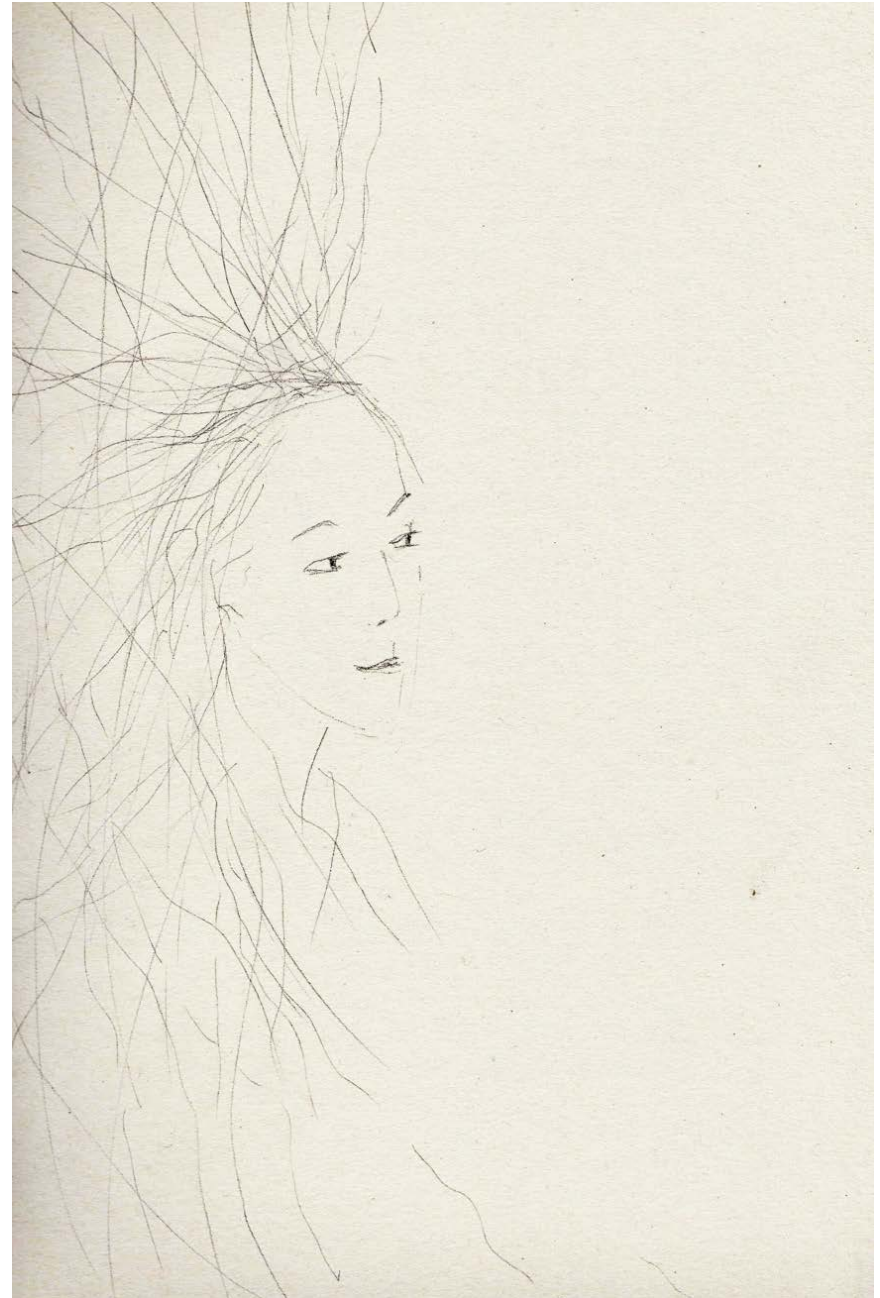
At that time we were living and working in an old vernacular sea house where we were supposed to design a restaurant. And I can remember clearly that we started of being very much ‘architects’: trying to have concepts about how to add this new layer of a Mexican restaurant into a sea-house. And then, little by little, we were so much immersed into this old fantastic house – a part of

it is from the XVI Century– and we were excavating and finding things as the renovation went by. So we lost quite early these kind of concepts that we had learned at school, such as ‘how you juxtapose new and old’, and everything should be very clearly separated and articulated. I remember the day when we threw them away! We were much more into finding things, revealing old stuff that no one had seen before, because covered with layers of transformation. And in this discovering, or taking apart things, we got in a very close contact with the timber structure, with the smell of the place, with the history that came to us through these layers. We entered in a kind of dialogue with that house: and the house started to speak to us about what was the right thing to do. Or in other words, we started to find something that we could do ‘together with the house’. That is what I would call a kind co-creative state of mind: when things started to kick back to us, and we are not getting anywhere with our preconceptions anymore. But in that period of time this was not very conscious, it just happened. Only afterwards I could reflect upon it. Now we have to leave what we’ve learned, we have to find a solution through making it and without putting something on it.

So the project you just described has given a sort of imprinting to your way of creating. Though such a “co-creative state of mind” arose at that time by chance, dismantling your certitudes as students. But how did it evolve into something more conscious? I wonder if the concept of “Relational Design” that you have developed comes as a result of this awareness.

Yes, at that time it was not a method. It is something that has been developing over time, reading theories and making new projects. But I can remember that I could recognize this feeling of ‘becoming one’ with what we were doing, of listening what is happening between me or us and the place. This is very similar to playing, as I recall it from my childhood. Loosing myself into something and becoming one with what I am doing. This is not completely new, but of course it is getting another, a

Figure 1.4
Siv Helene
Stangeland
(by Valentina
Signore).



professional context to it. Moreover, later we used it more as a method. As a method we called it 'walk the land', because when we start a project we try to 'sensitize' for the place and the context by being there, walking there, and studying things, and a similar dialogue occurs...

...a kind of experience of entering a conversation with the place.

I would like to know more about this method. And I find it fascinating the idea of a method able to re-create every time this sort of magic moment of things happening by themselves, without putting too much your intentions and pre-conceptions on them. But then the question is how can you maintain this openness and at the same time develop mastery? How can you keep in a method a real openness?

Some methods have to do with entering into a sensitive state, which can be just being in a place for a long period. We were using film as a medium, because filming makes it possible to just be there without selecting anything, and we could retreat and select afterwards, and discover things by selecting again. In a period of time we were using it quite a lot. Then there were also moments in which we were more interested in gathering things from the place. Because just having complex or diverse fragments of materials, of stories or phenomenas that had to do with the project gathered on a table, then things that we could not foresee started to happen between them. We called it the 'full table' or 'stack table'.

Then we were becoming much more aware that we could design processes where people engaged. People that were somehow related to the project, as future users or other resources, around the project, the clients, people around the clients, that they could be also part of this self-organizing process. And we became very much obsessed with self-organizing processes, to an extent that we were almost extinguishing our own design. In some

period of time we didn't want to touch the drawing, to design something purposely. We wanted just something to emerge by itself. Of course it went along with reading emergent theories and so on. Both reading and learning something and then testing it out in our context. So that was a whole branch, just these participatory processes, or even with neighbours, children, artists.

And then we also went along with this methods of finding things, instead of designing things. It became a kind of methods as well. We were finding things in the industries in our own town. We could transfer not only objects but also skills and production methods. I would say that this is also a kind of development of the same motivation to be in dialogue with what is there and let these resources generate together with us the architecture and the project.

...What more?... And then, there is also a becoming aware of this double necessity: from one hand Reinhard and me having a kind of design control, the will to be 'something', and on the other hand seeking for the emergent properties, to make things happen. It has been of course a continuous tension. But we became more and more aware that both of these aspects are important. We have to enhance and elaborate our own self assertive quality or skill, along this other emergent property that we want to happen.

In this sense I think that my drawing practice has been a method for me, when I kind of enclose the creative process to me and something. It has been very much through drawing that it has happened. It is also through meditation practice that I have been becoming aware of what is happening when I am creating with a medium. Just myself. And this is interesting because it was a way of also seeing and accepting that my individual contribution is also very important. Because at a certain moment we were nearly 'losing our own territories' because we were so much involving other people and other process to happen.

I was just thinking how the tension you just described is visible in your work: I feel the openness but at the same time I do “see” you. You are not invisible at all, but it is true that I don’t see your ‘ego’. I wonder: where do we exactly find you as the “author” of your works? You mentioned drawing and meditation as two moments where you are more in contact with your own position in the design process. I would like to understand more in what sense these moments help you to find your own role and position in this openness.

I think there is a link between becoming aware of something and creativity. And these two things are very close to each other.

I’m just noticing that sketching is a kind of circular movement where I start with an underlay, then I put a transparent paper on it. And I draw again. And it is never the same of what is underneath. There is always a small variation that is about seeing a possibility and then, looking at it, I become aware of that difference. And nearly at the same time, as I see there is a movement or a change I get the impulse to go further in that direction. And this is the kind of the same that happens when I become aware of something: I see something, I can recognize it and then I let it go because I want to let new things happen.

It’s daring to put forward something that I don’t know what it is. And then looking at it, seeing what it is, recognize it as something, and then leaving it again to put another layer that is always a search for something that I don’t know what it is.

And this normally happens within a certain time. It is a kind of circular movement that can take one hour. During that hour there is always something happening that I can use. But there has to be always that time frame. It is not something that can happen in two

minutes, it has to unfold for a period of time and in the end there is something there that has a quality.

It seems that what you do in your projects is exactly what you do with yourself. The kind of listening you have with a project you have it with yourself while you draw.

Yes exactly, but here I use a simple medium that is drawing. One could say that it is something similar to when I am meditating. Using my breath. It is a medium where I can reflect on where I am in relation to that medium. No matter if it is the drawing in the design or the breath in the meditation, it is a bit the same what is happening.

I would like to point to another aspect in the tension you described before. Hearing about openness one may think that there is no place for strong aims or for clear goals. But they are not absent from your work: you explicitly name something that you point at in any project, beyond its specific reality. I quote you “We aim to creatively engage with sustainability, not only in the design of spaces, but also in the conception and organization of the design process, including construction and fabrication. Our goal is move away from a solely technical and anthropocentric view, allowing the project to unfold in relation to its environmental, social, cultural and economic context”

We understand Sustainability in a holistic sense, which means that it is not only about energy efficiency and counting our CO₂ footprint. But it is much more about how we go along with all our resources, our communal resources, individual resources, and global resources. These three levels are essential to us. It means that it is as important as we work together: we have to be happy with what we do. And we have to ask ourselves big existential questions, such Why are doing this? What is the contribution to this? Ours is a holistic project. I

think we can learn a lot from nature in this respect. We read a lot about biology and system theory, because Nature is working in systems and wholes all the time. And there we can find often beautiful examples about how to do that in our processes. So the Sustainability is also about exactly this notion of being able to 'grow' new things. I use grow consciously because I think that our creativity is very much based on growing things, is not something jumping out from somewhere. But it is something growing out of a relational dynamic process... with feedback loops, which is also something happening in nature, it is something also that we want to have, as in nature, because we think it is a way of adjusting a project so that it is not only our own belief or agenda but by testing it on the way it gets redundant and resilient. The quality that it needs to survive and to make it a meaningful answer for the situation, not only to ourselves. So that is the notion of growing. The idea of growing architecture is also a part of our sustainable understanding.

The word 'create' is related with the latin 'crescere' that means to grow. Growing, connects to the idea of life which is not always so evident in Architecture, considered something stable and still. You refer to this growth mainly to the process that leads to the creation of a project, including the working atmosphere, the existential questions that animate the process. What about the life of your projects after your design process? What happens after your projects are built? Is there in your work an attempt to say "design life", in a long term perspective? As growing a child you cannot predict what will really happen. Is this part of your preoccupation as an architect? Is there any project where you especially tackled this aspect?

There are some projects, especially one in particular where, intentionally or in the most precise way, we have kind of included "life" after our work. Which was the

Norwegian Pavilion for the Shanghai expo (China, 2010).

Although the funny thing is that in this case we have never got to see what really happened to it after the expo! But the design was conceived so that after the expo it could continue to have a life with the future users. Our idea was in fact to involve the future users already while we were developing the project. And it was meant to be a part of the exhibition. However it didn't happen because the bureaucracy around an expo is too complex and the Norwegian State didn't want to handle on it. We did a structure which had some layers on it, where the outer layer could be manipulated. Since it couldn't be the future users, we showed that it is possible to make a structure that can have that adaptability through it, not only in the design process itself but also afterwards. Then there are other examples. Like the Library in Vennesla (Norway, 2011), that is a kind of finished work from our part. But we have visited it several times and we see that the users go on finding new ways of occupying it. Not only the physical furniture, but also the building as a whole for other uses than we planned. It is used for weddings, communal activities, which is unexpected for us. That is beautiful! That's how it should be!

While you speak I have always the feeling that the main quality of your way of creating is not only a matter of job, of making architecture, but it is more connected to a way of being and of living. Life and architecture are not that easily separable. When you describe your partnership with Reinhard you say: "I guess that what sustain our partnership is a shared philosophy of understanding both life and architecture as a continuous co-creation". I would like to know more about this connection, about your philosophy of life that is beyond your philosophy of architecture.

...

I think about this very strong experience from childhood. From the creative play, and the intensity and feeling of power that this ability to enter a kind of enchanted state where everything is possible and you co-create what is happening all the time.

There has always been an urge to understand more. I have been reading, trying to find literature and people who have similar experiences and put other words on it. And I've found Freya Mathews who is an eco-philosopher. She is also referring to Australian aborigines and how they relate to nature. They have this way of walking where they are entering into conversations with the place and they change also themselves in this practice. I think that it was very precise to my own experience... It touched me to know that it was part of their culture to practice this as their way to relate to their surroundings. And she has also developed a whole philosophy around the possibility of having another relation to our reality which is co-creative. She bases it on different ancient philosophers, naming it a 'PAN Philosophy'. She refers to Eros and Psyche, saying that it is possible to have an erotic relationship with our surroundings even today. Even though we don't live in nature, we can recall this way of being. Of course this is the reaction to a mechanist world view. And then, from her, I went on reading about cognitive science. I was interested in how the mind works. Also because I am meditating and I wanted to understand what was really going on. Francisco Varela has co-written a beautiful book about becoming aware, where I found exactly this description of what is going on. And he has also developed theories about co-developed horizons of our reality. Reality is not something 'out there' that we are discovering, but it is somewhere here that we are co-creating. Reality is a co-creation. I believe strongly in that.

You mentioned philosophers and thinkers influencing you. Is there anybody else or anything else that is significant for you? An experience, a place a meeting a person,

something or somebody that is particularly significant?

Of course Reinhard is a very significant person. I think that the most important thing that we share is the philosophy of life and it is something that we always can nurture each other with, it gives us a perspective on what we are doing. This level of communicating is essential for us. To be able to be creative together. Although we are interested in different things and philosophers, and we like different things, there has always been an existential conversation going on. That is essential both for the creation and for the relationships.

I see how in the identity of your practice there is already the openness that you seek in your work. In H&H there is already a plurality, a relation, an openness in its own nature. Do you think that this capacity to be open is linked also to the fact that you are one and two at the same time? And how does it concretely work? And again, in this partnership, can you point at something that identifies more your own role and your own position?

I think that what you say is true. We are in fact always both engaged in all the projects. We don't separate. It is a continuous dialogue about everything.

If I think of something that characterize more myself in the partnership I think it is maybe my interest in the "holistic" relational aspect, the fact that I'm always thinking about it and pointing at it. I believe that it is always present and it is all manifest in how we organize ourselves, our life. You cannot separate anything. You cannot say: we do this architecture. What we do is always also reflecting who we are, and how we live, how we organize us as a team. So I guess that I am the one that says: let's look at ourselves now!

Thank you very much Siv, it was indeed beautiful to listen to you.

1.5 Interview with Akira Kasai

Akira Kasai was born in Japan in 1943. He is acknowledged as one of the pioneers of butoh dance together with its founders Kazuo Ohno (1906-2010) and Tatsumi Hijikata (1928-1986). Before meeting them and discovering butoh in the early 1960s, Kasai was trained in modern dance, ballet and pantomime. He started his own studio in 1971 but he interrupted his dance career in 1979, when he moved to Germany with his family to study Eurythmy and the European culture, that since then have deeply influenced his work, thus marking a decisive evolution of butoh. Back to Japan since 1986 he returned on stage only in 1994 with the work *Saraphita* and revived his studio Tenshi kan. After 15 years of interruption, his career has quickly flourished: since then he has performed, choreographed and taught in Asia, the Americas and Europe.

The interview took place in Rome in May 2014, after a five days dance workshop to which I participated. The interview was in our mother languages: Italian and Japanese, with the kind translation of the interpreter Daisuke Kurihara.

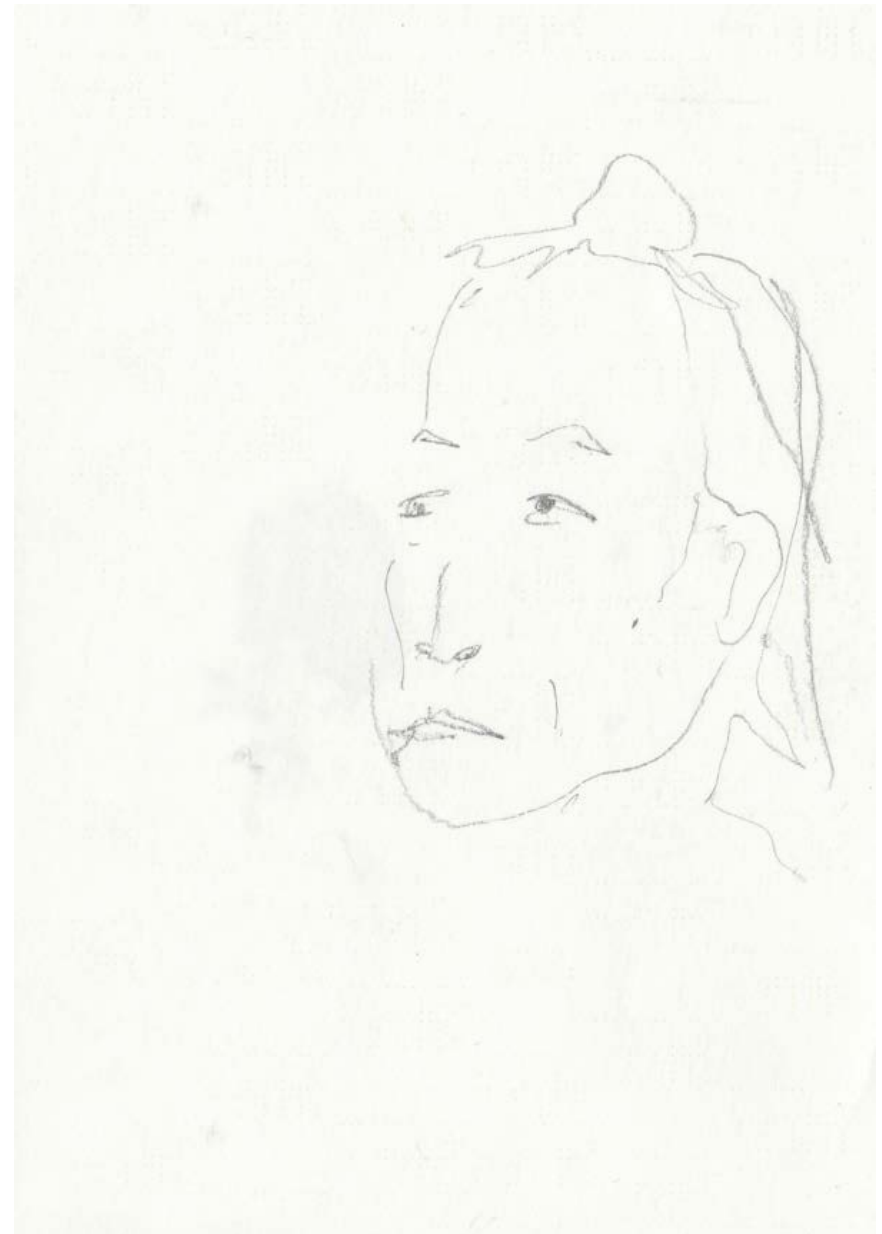
Valentina Signore

Mr Kasai, I would like to ask you what it is to create a dance. Both as a dancer and as a choreographer. As the one that improvises and one that designs a dance for others in advance. During your conference yesterday you said that imagination is stronger than reality, because it creates reality. So I would like to know if imagination and creation are the same thing for you. And then, what does it mean in your work to imagine improvising and to imagine as a choreographer.

Akira Kasai

Yesterday and today we spoke about turning the body inside out. To move the body means to turn it over, to revolt it so that what was interior becomes exterior, and what was exterior ends up at the interior. The interior of a body. It is the same for material things too. Think about where is the interior of a thing. Imagine to break this stone in two parts to see its interior. What appears then is not the interior, but another exterior. And so we break it again, and again, till the infinite. But so then, where is the interior of the thing, of the matter? Valentina, where do you think the interior of matter is?

Figure 1.5
Akira Kasai
(by Valentina
Signore).



I think I can feel it, but I cannot see it.

Yes, we can only feel it. And if we want to enter the interior of things, there is only one entrance: the imagination. To create an unlimited imagination starting from that thing. From this stone for example. For example, this stone. The image can be anything. This is my tooth. Can I say that this is my tooth? In the imagination we don't have the category right or wrong. It is impossible to insert the idea of right or wrong in the imagination.

In the moment we perceive an image as real, then it is correct. For this I can say with no problem that this stone is my tooth. It is my tooth. With this stone-tooth I eat the world, with this I eat the time, I eat the vegetal.

And in the moment that I know that this image is like this, then it is correct. Thus, to imagine means to extract till the infinite imagination from the matter. To dance, improvising.

Improvisation is something that arises at the instant. It is not like a choreography of course, but it is generated instant by instant. It's a matter of dancing those images that are generated at any given time. For the improvised dance, what is at stake is not to judge if it is a good dance or not, but how much 'reality' is present in the imagination that is creating that movement.

Where does the imagination come from? From the matter or from yourself?

It comes from both. Both from the matter and from the one who imagines. If we analyze scientifically this stone: this stone is not me, this stone in an object. The imagination binds me to the stone. And without imagination mankind and matter cannot find a connection.

How much of your intention and will is there? Where is your intention in it? Yesterday during the workshop you told us that if you want to create a "free" movement, you don't arrive to create it, because you want it. When

you decide to create a dance, what makes this happen? How does the creation of a dance, of a choreography start?

*When we create something, we don't create it by understanding it. In other words, we don't know what it will turn out at the end. **We create because we don't know. If we already knew we wouldn't create. Thus, while we create we never know.***

Thus, to create is to put oneself in the condition of not-knowing?

It is exactly because I don't know that I do create. It is like the meeting between a man and a woman. You can meet only a person that you don't know. Nobody knows when they will be together how it will go, how their relationship will end up. But this is why we meet. It is the same for the relationship that is created between me and the stone. Initially there was nothing between us two. In the moment when this object gives me an image, then a bind is created, something starts.

So this way of entering into a creation doesn't regard just the dance, but is a more general attitude, towards the world and life.

It is exactly as you say. In life we cannot walk along a path that we already know. We walk because we don't know the path. Valentina, do you understand what I mean? It means to go and search for something. It means adventure. It means to jump toward the unknown.

What we already know, in general, doesn't count so much. To jump in the unknown it is possible only if we are prepared (willing) to throw ourselves into it, and this is a big adventure. If we throw ourselves into something having already expectations about what we will create, if we already know, then we don't really throw ourselves.

To do it we need courage, the courage to put our own life at risk. Without courage we cannot create. Without courage we cannot even think or reflect about the art. Art doesn't mean only to create an "oeuvre", but also at the

same time to transform ourselves till the infinite. I am completely different from the myself of yesterday.....

*For me Valentina of yesterday and Valentina of today are completely different. I am discovering a Valentina completely new, whose existence was unknown to me yesterday. **To leave every day in this way, this means to create.***

Maybe my answer is much different from what you were expecting. However, to create is not something easy. It is not easy. If you really want to create it means that everyday a new Valentina is born, and the one that is born is not anymore the Valentina of yesterday.

To be able to create thus it means to achieve a mastery in this capacity of taking risks, of throwing oneself into the unknown?

*No, this is not exactly like that. Artists don't exist. The artist doesn't exist. You can become artist but the artist doesn't exist. **Art doesn't arise from any kind of talent.** It arises only from one thing. We live only because we really desire to understand why we live.*

*Valentina. Why are you born? Where do you come from? Aren't you interested in these questions? This doesn't have anything to do with being an artist. Where are you born from? Where are you going? Why are you born female? This is just a curiosity, here, in the art, it is not important to have talent or not. You want to interview a dancer and an architect. I am not a dancer. I am a dancer only to the extent that I appear as such to the eyes of who looks at me. You have already decided
Valentina: He is a dancer. But it is not like that.*

We are not but people who live. You live, I live, Daisuke lives. But the way one lives... Mankind has many questions. Because nobody is born already knowing. Do you know why you are born?

I don't know...I can feel something, but nothing
I can express with words.

The important is this feeling...And what you feel is something that you cannot abandon anymore. The idea to keep it for the infinite, as a result, becomes imagination. In order to become conscious of what you feel as something real, then you can only rely on imagination.

I forgot all the questions that I had prepared

This is important. I would like to ask you how old are you?

Almost 32

Valentina, what do you want to do now in the future?

I don't know it exactly. I studied architecture, but I work as researcher. I'm studying butoh dance professionally, but I don't want to become a professional dancer. It's a kind of contradiction, with which I struggle sometimes. As if I would like to take a definitive shape. But somehow I don't, I focus more on the moment than on the future. There are some things that are important for me, things I would like to develop and share, but I don't care so much about the medium through which I do it. It can be dance, architecture or writing. Maybe I don't have to choose necessarily, I am somebody connecting and connected by these things... as these interviews I am conducting show in a way..

Valentina, you studied architecture. Dance and Architecture are very connected. Dance is architecture in movement. In Architecture the structure is very important. Dance is impossible if we don't know the structure of the body. Architecture and dance are very well connected. Once Rilke wrote some letters to a man that he

*didn't know. Even though he was completely unknown for him, he replied every day. Every day Rilke wrote him a reply. This series of letters has been published then. I would like to tell you exactly the same thing that Rilke told to this man. **Art starts when there is no method.** But the start of it is, as you told, when we feel something. It is a sort of very light breeze, an almost imperceptible breeze, but if we do not notice it, then poetry cannot start. Rilke didn't reply to him because he knew him, nor because he found any affinity in the letter he wrote him. Why is this person asking me these things? Between these people there was an unbridgeable difference in their life experience, in the way they lived. However Rilke continued to write him only because this person could feel such a breeze. Among other things he says also: How could that man become an artist? That was the kind of question that Rilke hated the most. How to become a poet? There was no other question that could annoy him more. That is why he started to write him.*

He was generous

No. It's not enough to say he was generous. We cannot define it generosity. Maybe it is Sadness. Why is there such a big difference between me and you. He continued to write letters because he felt sufferance, a sort of desperation. Valentina, you say generosity but it is not this. He is moved by this deep sadness of the difference between them. Moreover Rilke was not such a gentle person. If you think it was generosity it is the most far from art. To think it is generosity is what ordinary is believed. In this sense you are looking at art from the common sense. You have to abandon the common sense to reflect on Art. I invite you to read these letters.

I will. Thank you mr. Kasai... It has been a “two ways” interview.

You didn't get the answer that you expected.

No, I didn't indeed. I thought we were going to speak more about your work. But I am glad. I am touched by our conversation.